



**SENATOR**

# Mary Margaret Haugen

E-Newsletter - 10th District

[Web Site](#) | [Contact me](#) | [About the Legislature](#)

**10th Legislative District**

**February 6, 2009**

## **2009 LEGISLATURE — WEEK FOUR**

It's no secret that times are tough. The biggest issue facing the Legislature this year is how to balance the operating budget with our decreasing revenues and increasing costs to provide the public services that we all expect and rely on.

This week I got an e-mail about a "budget calculator" recently released by the Governor's Office that lets anyone with internet access play with different scenarios for balancing the budget by adjusting eight functional areas and comparing their scenario to the governor's proposal.

The areas where you can adjust spending in the states operating budget are:

- ? Student Achievement
- ? Higher Education
- ? Public Safety
- ? Human Services for Vulnerable Children & Adults
- ? Health of Washingtonians
- ? Natural Resources/Culture & Recreation
- ? Governmental Efficiency
- ? Economic Vitality

This tool isn't something that's going to give you a "line item veto" — but it does give you the chance to increase or cut spending in broad budget areas to see if you can balance things out on the big scale.

If you'd like to take a crack at balancing the operating budget, please give it a try at <http://www.governor.wa.gov/priorities/budget/calculator.asp>.

## **MORE VISITORS**

Yes, I know I mention it just about every week — but how can I pass up the opportunity?

We had plenty of local visitors in my office this week, including members of the Northwest Agriculture Business Center, who were here for a legislative reception. I was so pleased to see attendance from local farmers in my district, including Sarah Richards from Lavender Wind Farms in Coupeville, John Roozen from Washington Bulb Company in Mount Vernon, and Curtis Johnson from Pleasant Valley Farms in Mount

Vernon. I am so proud of the people in my district taking a day out of their schedule to come to Olympia and showcase our local products.

I am also excited that almost weekly I am able to meet local young people from our area who come for a field trip to see the Capitol when the Legislature is in session.



Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen with Cedarhome Elementary 4th graders at the Senate rostrum. 20090205-0787 WASENATE ab

This week I was joined on the floor of the Senate by the fourth-grade classes from Cedarhome Elementary School.



Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen and page Kennan Mighell. 20090206-0824 WASENATE ab

I also had the honor of sponsoring Kennan Mighell, a sophomore at Stanwood High School. His brother John paged for me in 2006, and I was so pleased to have Kennan page for me this year.

Kennan plays on the Stanwood High School Lacrosse Team and did a wonderful job paging for the Senate.

### **MOVING FORWARD ON THE BUDGET**

Most of our time during this part of the session is spent dealing with big-picture issues — and, as I mentioned earlier, there's no topic bigger this year than the budget.

Bills from both the House and Senate aiming to make cuts to the state operating budget are quickly moving their way through the Legislature.

On Monday the House of Representatives approved its version, a move that helped close the 2007-09 deficit while also reducing the anticipated shortfall lawmakers must address for the 2009-11 budget they'll adopt this spring. [House Bill 1694](#) was then given a hearing in the [Senate Ways and Means Committee](#) the next day and could be voted off the Senate floor next week.

Meanwhile, the Senate has approved its version of an early cuts bill, [Senate Bill 5460](#), which was given a hearing Tuesday in the House Ways and Means Committee.

Additionally, the state's [Economic and Revenue Forecast Council](#) announced this week it will release a preliminary revenue forecast on Feb. 19, a month ahead of its regularly scheduled quarterly forecast in March. The additional forecast will give lawmakers in both chambers updated figures to work with as they begin to nail down details in crafting their budget proposals.

## **LOCAL CONTROL OF EDUCATION**

In tough times, school districts need more flexibility to be as effective as possible with each dollar. On Thursday, three senators rolled out legislation to reduce the number of mandates imposed on districts.

Right now, districts are required to comply with literally hundreds of state mandates — but the education flexibility bills sponsored by Sens. [Rosemary McAuliffe](#), D-Bothell, [Steve Hobbs](#), D-Lake Stevens, and [Joe McDermott](#), D-West Seattle, will remove, suspend, or delay some of those mandates.

The legislation also sets the condition that other mandates be followed only if funding is available. In all, nearly 90 laws are repealed, suspended or effective only if funding is available.

The bills address laws related to the following areas:

- ? [Senate Bill 5889](#) deals with laws concerning information, notice and reporting requirements, curriculum and assessment;
- ? [Senate Bill 5890](#) addresses policy and program mandates; and
- ? [Senate Bill 5880](#) addresses laws related to training, task forces, health mandates, and educator awards.

I'm especially encouraged that each of the three bills were written with extensive input from local school districts, principals and teachers to represent what is — or isn't — working for them.

## **HEALTH PROTECTIONS**

This week we also took two important steps to protect your family from potentially deadly infections and chemicals.

- ? [Senate Bill 5282](#) would limit the use of Bisphenol-A (BPA), a chemical that could harm human health and is found in everything from baby bottles to canned foods.
- ? [Senate Bill 5500](#) would protect patients against MRSA infections by requiring hospitals to test patients admitted to ICU or surgery for the bacteria. The bill also requires all MRSA-related deaths be clearly noted on death certificates.

These bills, both sponsored by [Sen. Karen Keiser](#), D-Kent, were heard this week in the [Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee](#).

## **SENATE TAKES THE LEAD ON JOB CREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Senate is also focused on improving economic development in Washington, and recently passed a slate of bills aimed at creating jobs and improving the state's entrepreneurial environment.

Recognizing that tough economic times are exactly when our small businesses should be able to focus on remaining competitive and keeping people employed, we passed [Senate Bill 5042](#) to provide some flexibility for employers who make minor paperwork mistakes. Sponsored by [Sen. Derek Kilmer](#), D-Gig Harbor, it is legislation that's been backed by the Association of Washington Business, the National Federation of Independent Business and the Building Industry Association of Washington.

We also passed [Senate Bill 5554](#) to strengthen the State Board of Community & Technical Colleges' "Job Skills Program." The bill, also sponsored by Sen. Kilmer, directs the board to place an emphasis on high-demand and high-growth job fields. By investing our existing training dollars into training programs that involve collaboration with industry, we can help provide workers with training for the jobs of tomorrow and grow the talent pool that businesses rely upon — ensuring that our investments get the most "bang for the buck."

Although Washington was recently ranked as one of [the best states for business](#), we need to do everything we can to provide incentives for new companies to come here — and one way of doing that is by guaranteeing training for workers.

Sponsored by [Sen. Paull Shin](#), D-Edmonds, [Senate Bill 5616](#) makes changes to the Washington Customized Employment Workforce Training Program so that, during these tough economic times, employers participating in the program may delay payments to the account. This — along with dedicating some of their funding towards training, marketing, and facilitation services — will increase the use of the program and make it an even more effective resource for worker training.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS**

Many people trying to apply for unemployment benefits have encountered backed up phone lines at the [Employment Security Department](#). This is because the agency had reduced its staff during extremely low unemployment in 2007 and early 2008, which made good fiscal sense at the time.

However, last December the agency processed a record-setting 90,331 new claims — by far the most the agency has ever processed in one month.

With the number of applicants up by 92 percent, the agency found itself drastically short on trained intake agents. Since then, the agency has been scrambling to train new agents, add phone lines and expand its hours — opening phone lines on Saturdays, for example — to better handle the unprecedented workload. But until the agency can catch all the way up with demand, here are some tips to make the application process go smoother:

- ? Instead of applying by phone, apply online at [www.esd.wa.gov](http://www.esd.wa.gov).
- ? If you must call (800-318-6022), use a land line to avoid using up cell-phone minutes while waiting for an agent. The wait times will probably be long.



- ? Don't hang up. Redialing will put you at the end of the line.
- ? If you're a night owl, take advantage of the lighter traffic and call the automated phone line in the wee hours such as 1 a.m.
- ? Be prepared with complete and accurate employment information for the past two years. Inaccurate information will delay your benefits.
- ? Use the phone system's automated features to file a weekly claim, reopen an existing claim, check on a benefit payment and change your address.
- ? When you do get through, tell the agent the date that you first tried to call. Your claim will be backdated so you won't lose money because of the delay.

### **WE'RE HERE TO HELP**

My executive assistant Nova Gattman, legislative assistant Gina Bull and intern Beau Perschbacher are available to provide constituent services to the people of our community, so please feel free to contact us with questions or concerns—whether they involve bills before the Legislature or topics you feel are being overlooked.

You can reach me by [e-mail](#) or call my office in Olympia at **360-786-7618**. If you have a concern, I want to hear it.

In the meantime, please visit my [web page](#) for up-to-date info on what's happening at the Legislature. I post regular updates — including video — onto my blog, and it's far more information than we'd want to put into a weekly update like this.

Until next week — Take Care!

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.